SERIOUS and FREE

# THOUGHTS

ON THE

# PRESENT STATE

OF THE

# CHURCH,

AND OF

# RELIGION;

Addreſſed, as an humble Expoſtulation,

To the Right Reverend their Lordſhips, the BISHOPS of the CHURCH of ENGLAND.

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The FOURTH EDITION, with ADDITIONS.

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By a *CHRISTIAN.*

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*—Can ye not diſcern the Signs of the Times!* Mat. xvi. 3.

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# SERIOUS and FREE

# THOUGHTS, &c.

My Lords,

IT is a very dark, and every day becomes a more just picture of the face of things around us, which was drawn by a late great Prelate [a] of your Church, who thus paints and laments the completion of the times.

"An open disregard to Religion is become, through a variety of unhappy causes, the distinguishing character of the present age. This evil is grown to a great height in the metropolis of the nation; is daily spreading through every part of it; bringing in such dissolutenels and con-

[a] Archbishop Secker.

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# THOUGHTS, &c.

MY LORDS,

IT is a very dark, and every day becomes a more juſt picture of the face of things around us, which was drawn by a late great Prelate [a] of your Church, who thus paints and laments the complection of the times.

"An open diſregard to *Religion* is be-
"come, through a variety of unhappy
"cauſes, the diſtinguiſhing character of the
"preſent age. This evil is grown to a great
"height in the metropolis of the nation;
"is daily ſpreading through every part of it;
"bringing in ſuch diſſoluteneſs and con-

[a] Archbiſhop Secker.

"tempt of principle in the higher part of "the world, and ſuch profligate intem- "perance and fearleſſneſs of committing "crimes in the lower, as muſt, if this "torrent of impiety ſtop not, become ab- "ſolutely fatal: And GOD knows, far from "ſtopping, it receives, through the ill de- "ſigns of ſome, and the inconſiderateneſs "of others, continual increaſe.

"*Chriſtianity* is now ridiculed and railed "at with very little reſerve; and the *Teach-* "*ers* of it without any at all. — Diſregard "to public worſhip and inſtruction hath "increaſed: many are grown prejudiced "againſt *Religion*; many more indifferent "about it. The emiſſaries of the Church "of *Rome* have begun to reap great harveſts "in the field, which hath thus been pre- "pared for them.

"This melancholy ſtate of things (his "Lordſhip proceeds) calls loudly upon us "(the *Clergy*) to correct our miſtakes; to "ſupply our deficiencies; and earneſtly to "beg of GOD, that he would direct the "hearts of thoſe who preſide over the "public welfare, and humbly to repreſent "to them, on all fit occaſions, the de-

"clining ſtate of religion, and the im-
"portance and the means of preſerving
"it. Theſe things are unqueſtionable
"duties.—"

It is from a deep ſenſe of this duty that I preſume thus to addreſs your Lordſhips; and humbly to ſuggeſt ſome *occaſions* of this ſpreading evil, which ſeem not to have been ſo thoroughly and ſo ſeriouſly adverted to, as their importance deſerves. To know the cauſe of a diſeaſe, in the body politic as well as natural, is the firſt ſtep to its cure. The cauſes of the preſent prevailing *ſcepticiſm* are, no doubt, complicated and various. The ſtrictneſs of the *Chriſtian* morals, and the reſtraint which the *Goſpel* lays upon the corrupt appetites of men, is, probably, a chief cauſe of ſome men's violent oppoſition to it. But there are, my Lords, I apprehend, a variety of inferior cauſes, *offences*, the Goſpel calls them, which co-operate and help it on; *offences*, which confirm greatly men's prejudices againſt CHRISTIANITY; and which ſtrongly tempt, and ſeem to warrant, their treating things reputed ſacred with much drollery and ridicule: *offences*, which are found,

found, not in its profeſſors only, but in thoſe who are ſet for its propagation and defence.

May I be permitted, my Lords, with the freedom of a *Chriſtian*, to expoſtulate on this ſubject? Things evidently ſeem to draw, as his Lordſhip above obſerves, to a dangerous and important *criſis*. When the exigency of affairs preſſes, a liberty of ſpeech may with ſome confidence be claimed. Will your Lordſhips then indulge me, whilſt with no greater freedom than the great danger of the cauſe ſeems plainly to require, I endeavour to point out *ſome things*, which hang as a portentous weight upon the cauſe of CHRISTIANITY, and are ſome of the *fatal ſtones*, at which the *ſceptics* of the preſent age ſtumble, dangerouſly ſtumble, and ſometimes grievouſly fall. *It is impoſſible*, we are told, *but offences will come*: but *woe to that man*, woe to that church, *by whom the offence cometh!*

Great, it muſt be owned, is the felicity of this nation in having ſo many of its eſtabliſhed Clergy, whoſe learning and whoſe lives reflect honour on their profeſſion, and whoſe writings have bleſſed the world with

ſome of the nobleſt defences of virtue and religion. But, as matters are at preſent *conſtituted*, are there not ſome things, which greatly abate the force of the ſtrongeſt arguments they offer? Some *prejudices*, which too naturally and too juſtly ariſe, of which diſaffected minds avail themſelves not a little in their oppoſition to CHRISTIANITY?

The *firſt* unhappy cauſe of the growth of *infidelity*, which I beg leave to mention, is a general apprehenſion that the Clergy themſelves are not thoroughly perſuaded of the truth and importance of the *Chriſtian* Religion, inaſmuch as they ſolemnly ſubſcribe *Articles*, which they do not *really believe*; and declare publicly in GOD's preſence, their *unfeigned aſſent and conſent* to forms, in divine worſhip, which they *highly diſapprove*; perhaps, heartily condemn.

If this apprehenſion, my Lords, appears to be well founded: if there is good reaſon to think, that your Lordſhips, the *Biſhops*, do rigorouſly impoſe, and that the *Clergy* ſubſcribe, *Articles of Religion* which neither *you*, nor *they*, do really believe;

and

and that, in the moſt ſolemn manner, your Lordſhips require, and they are conſtrained to give, unfeigned *aſſent and conſent* to certain matters and forms, which, at the ſame time, *you both* judge to be highly cenſurable and wrong — What will, my Lords, what muſt a doubting enquirer naturally conclude; but, that the profeſſion of *Chriſtianity* is all artifice and pretence! That there is no ſuch thing as conſcience, integrity, or faith in tranſactions, relating to *eccleſiaſtical* concerns! That the terrors, which the *Goſpel* threatens to the hypocrite and unbeliever, are known, by thoſe who preach them, to be all but an empty phantom; as are the rewards alſo, which it promiſes to thoſe who are courageous to confeſs and avow the truth! [*b*]

The

[*b*] Biſhop *Burnet* ſays — "He is forced to declare: "That having had much free converſation with many "who have been fatally corrupted with *atheiſtic* and *in-*"*fidel* principles; they have very often owned to him, "that nothing ſo much promoted this in them as the "very bad opinion which they took up, of all Clergy-"men of all ſides:"

"That

The *Articles of Religion*, which your Lordſhips are obliged to make every *Clergyman* ſubſcribe, and which every *Clergyman* does with great ſolemnity ſubſcribe, it is notorious to the whole world are ſtrongly, what is called, *Trinitarian* and *Calviniſtic*. Little leſs notorious is it, that the *Clergy* are, generally, gone far from the *religious ſentiments* which the Articles expreſs, and are many, or even moſt of them either *Unitarian* or *Arminian*. What, then, can any ſerious impartial ſpectator judge; when

"That they did not ſee in them that contempt of the "world—that diligence and earneſtneſs with relation "to the great truths of the *Chriſtian Religion*, which "they reckoned they would moſt certainly have, if they "themſelves *firmly believed* it. They therefore concluded; "that thoſe whoſe buſineſs it was more ſtrictly to en- "quire into the truth of their religion, knew that "it was not ſo certain, as they themſelves, for other "ends, endeavoured to make the world believe it was: "and that though, for the carrying on their own *au-* "*thority* or *fortunes*, which in one word they called "their *trade*, they ſeemed very poſitive in affirming "the truth of their *doctrine*, yet they in their own "hearts did *not believe* it, ſince they lived ſo little ſuit- "able to it." *Paſtoral Care, Preface*: pag. 15, 16.

gentlemen in the *Unitarian* ſcheme ſubſcribe ſolemnly, in GOD's preſence, (i. e. calling upon HIM to witneſs to the *ſincerity* and *truth* with which they ſubſcribe) the *Firſt*, the *Second*, and the *Eighth* Articles of the Church, which ſtrongly aſſert — Art. I. *That there is but* ONE *living and true* GOD—*And in the* UNITY *of this* GODHEAD, *there be* THREE PERSONS OF ONE SUBSTANCE, POWER AND ETERNITY, *the Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt.* Art. II. *That the* SON *is* THE VERY *and* ETERNAL GOD *of* ONE SUBSTANCE *with the* FATHER—Art. VIII. *And that the Creed of* Athanaſius *ought thoroughly to be received and believed; for it may be proved by moſt certain warrants of holy ſcripture? And that whoever does not believe it faithfully, ſhall be moſt certainly and everlaſtingly damned?*

In like manner the gentlemen who favour what is called the *Arminian* ſcheme, and reject the *Calviniſtic*, ſtand forth before GOD, and ſubſcribe, and declare that *they do it willingly and ex animo*, (i. e. ſincerely and from their heart) *the Ninth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth and Eighteenth* Articles, as likewiſe the *Twentieth*, which expreſsly affirm—

affirm — Art. IX. *That* ORIGINAL, *or* BIRTH-SIN *is the fault or corruption of the nature of every man, that is naturally engendered of the offspring of* Adam; *and in every perſon born into this world it* DESERVETH GOD'S WRATH *and* DAMNATION.—Art. XIII. *That works done before the grace of* Chriſt, *and the inſpiration of his ſpirit, are not pleaſing to* GOD, *forasmuch as they ſpring not of faith in* Jeſus Chriſt, *neither do they make men meet to receive grace; yea, — we doubt not but they have the nature of ſin.*—Art. XVII. *That* PREDESTINATION *to life is the everlaſting purpoſe of* GOD, *whereby (before the foundation of the world) he hath conſtantly decreed by his counſel, ſecret to us, to deliver from curſe and damnation thoſe whom he hath choſen in* Chriſt *out of mankind, and to bring them by* Chriſt *to everlaſting ſalvation, as veſſels made to honour. And as the godly conſideration of* Predeſtination, *and our* Election *in* Chriſt, *is full of ſweet, pleaſant and unſpeakable comfort to godly perſons, ſo for curious and carnal perſons, lacking the ſpirit of* Chriſt, *to have continually before their eyes the ſentence of* GOD's *predeſti-*

*nation, is a moſt dangerous downfal, whereby the* Devil *doth thruſt them either into deſperation, or into wretchleſſneſs of moſt unclean living.*

Art. XVIII. *They alſo are to be held* accurſed, *who preſume to ſay, that every man ſhall be ſaved by the law or ſect which he profeſſeth, ſo that he be diligent to frame his life according to that law, and the light of nature.* — Art. XX. *The Church hath power to decree rites or ceremonies, and* authority *in controverſies of faith.*

THESE, my Lords, are *Articles*, which the Church repreſents as the plain and the undoubted doctrines of *Chriſtianity*. *This* it declares to be the *true Goſpel* of Jeſus Chriſt: And *theſe* it obliges every one of its Miniſters to ſubſcribe with his hand, in the preſence of *Almighty* GOD, and ſolemnly to declare, *that he believes them to be agreeable to the word of* GOD [*c*], before he is admitted to officiate in that character.

[*c*] Canon. XXXVI.

Now

Now if the generality of the *Clergy* [*d*] do in their conſciences believe this (in ſome one, at leaſt, or more points, if not in all) to be a very falſe repreſentation of the doctrines of CHRISTIANITY; a repreſentation *injurious* to the perfections of GOD; very highly diſhonourable and repugnant to the *Goſpel* ſcheme; but do nevertheleſs

[*d*] "*Predeſtination*, (ſays a learned member of that body) "a doctrine ſhocking, and manifeſtly contrary "to all the notions men naturally have of GOD, as a "wiſe, juſt, and good being, was oppoſed by *Arminius*; "who left behind him a man better qualified than him-"ſelf, to carry on the cauſe he had eſpouſed, I mean "the great *Epiſcopius*; whoſe writings ſoon flew all over "*Europe*, and were much read by the divines of the "Church of *England*, and to very good purpoſe; for "ſoon after *Calviniſm* vaniſhed from amongſt them "quite and clean." CLARKE's *Eſſay on Study*, pag. 13, 16.

So the late Biſhop of *Wincheſter*, in his excellent Sermons, "acknowledges it a thing beyond all con-"tradiction, that the doctrine of the Church of *Eng-"land*, delivered in its *Articles*, relating to *Juſtifica-"tion*, GOD's *Decrees*, and what are called the *five Points*, "hath undergone ſuch *alterations* as to be *entirely chang-"ed*, in the writings and diſcourſes of moſt of the "members of that church." Sermon on *Contending for the Faith*.

conſent

conſent thus ſolemnly to *ſubſcribe* the Articles abovementioned, and to *declare them agreeable to the Scriptures*: — What, my Lords, I again aſk, with great aſtoniſhment and concern, will, not only ſagacious *Deiſts*, but every attentive perſon, with good reaſon preſume —— But that *honeſty* and *truth* are fled from the earth; at leaſt, that *the Church* is no more the ſacred temple, where theſe heavenly gueſts dwell! What, but that *the contempt of principle* complained of as *brought into the* higher part *of the world*, reigns not only *there*; but has ſpread its baneful influence on another *order of men*; an order, whoſe chief deſign, and whoſe only glory it is, to be *patterns*, as well as *preachers* of uncorrupted faith and integrity amongſt men: who, no farther than they *act up* to this their primitive deſign, are of any benefit to ſociety; and in what meaſure they *counteract* it, by ſhewing *a contempt of principle*, and exhibit patterns of *double-dealing* and *inſincerity* to the world, they become of all men the moſt unworthy: and inſtead of meriting the eſteem, deſerve nought but the contempt and the indignation of

ſociety.

ſociety. If *the ſalt hath loſt its ſaltneſs*, the ſupreme Judge hath expreſsly ſaid, relating to this very point, *it is caſt out to the dunghill, and trodden under foot.*

*Original ſin*, one of the moſt learned of our late *Biſhops* [*e*] hath frankly declared "to be *a contradiction in terms*: for as "the word *ſin* implies an act of the "will, ſo the word *original* implies the "direct contrary; and ſuppoſes the crimi-"nal act to have been committed by *an-"other perſon*, to which act that perſon, "to whom the ſin is imputed, neither "contributed by thought, word, or "deed."

But, beſides the *contradiction in terms*, which the learned Biſhop aſſerts; to affirm, my Lords, as the *Article* (Art. IX.) is ſuppoſed to do, that every member of the human race, upon the account of *Adam*'s ſin doth really *merit* GOD's *wrath and damnation*: that is to ſay, that *infants* are no ſooner born than they become juſt objects of GOD's heavy anger, and *deſerve to be* DAMNED: *to be* DAMNED for *an act* in

[*e*] Thoughts on Self-Love, innate Ideas, &c. p. 17. by Biſhop Berkley.

which

which they had not the leaſt ſhare: an act committed *ſix thouſand years* before they came into being:—That the all-perfect and bleſſed GOD is angry, even to *wrath*, with the work of his own hands, who never have done, were never capable of doing the leaſt thing to *offend* him—This, my Lords, will be pronounced a doctrine ſo abhorrent to nature, to juſtice, to truth, (may it not be ſaid ſo *impious* and *profane*?) that it is candidly preſumed, that there is not one ſenſible and ſober *Clergyman* in the kingdom who *believes it*: and yet, aſtoniſhing to conſider! there is not one *Clergyman* in the kingdom, but hath ſolemnly *ſubſcribed it*: not one *Biſhop* in the kingdom, but abſolutely inſiſts upon it, as an *indiſpenſable* condition of admiſſion to the *Chriſtian* Miniſtry; even the learned *Biſhops* not excepted, who are preſumed to know and to acknowledge it to be a *contradiction in terms*.

Is there any virtue, my Lords, or honour; any prudence or diſcretion in ſuch procedure as this? Does it not directly tend to violate and lay waſte the conſcience; to throw down every fence of integrity and

truth; to open a way for all manner of licentiouſneſs both of principle and of practice, to break in like a deluge, and to ſweep from ſociety all diſtinction betwixt right and wrong? For, why, it may be juſtly aſked, ſhould it be accounted more criminal to equivocate and collude on the *Exchange*, than in the *Church*? Yea, why more atrocious to kiſs the book in a *Civil Court* in atteſtation to a fact, which I believe not to be true; than to ſubſcribe before GOD *Articles of Religion*, which I believe to be falſe? To me, my Lords, I profeſs ſolemnly, the actions appear much the ſame in a moral eſtimation; and *falſe-ſwearing* in the State ſeems nearly as reconcileable to honeſty and truth, as fallacious and inſincere *ſubſcribing* in the Church.

There are a variety of evaſive ſhifts, I know, of mental reſervations and forced explications, by which Gentlemen endeavour to ſoften and extenuate their conduct in this matter: but if weighed in an impartial balance, theſe will be found to be of a nature unſpeakably detrimental, and even deſtructive, to ſociety; tending utterly to defeat the uſe of *language* amongſt men; to con-

found ſentiments and ideas; to baniſh all preciſion, and indeed all meaning, from words; and to bring in everlaſting darkneſs and ambiguity in their ſtead. In ſhort, they are *ſuch*, as if any man ſhould preſume to uſe in *commercial* or *civil* life, would he not for ever forfeit his honour upon the *Exchange*, or in a *Court of Juſtice*; rouze a general indignation; and deliver up his character to laſting infamy and reproach?

There are, my Lords, I apprehend, no ſubterfuges, or ſoftenings, by which an *Arian* can ſubſcribe the Doctrines, and the Curſe, of *Athanaſius*'s Creed; or an *Arminian* the Article of *Original Sin*; and declare ſolemnly that he believes them *to be agreeable to the word of* God; but what would on the ſame principles alſo equally juſtify him in eluding the ſtricteſt examination in a Court of Juſtice *upon oath*, and in diſguiſing or concealing the truth in a cauſe of the greateſt moment in *Weſtminſter-Hall*.

Is not this to give *occaſion* to thoſe who are too ready to ſeek occaſion, not only to *diſbelieve*, but to *reproach* and *vilify*

our moſt holy RELIGION? Is it ſtrange, if ſagacious *Deiſts* ridicule the *Chriſtian* Prieſthood; inſult a character and an office ſo ſurreptitiouſly obtained; and treat all their pretended zeal about *doctrines* and *truth* as mere form and grimace! The temptation is exceeding ſtrong; and no wonder it has had a very powerful effect.

Here, my Lords, might I be indulged, I would beg leave for a remark on the extreme *vanity* and *inutility*, not to ſay the growing *miſchief*, of thus demanding *Subſcriptions* to human Articles and Forms: And to expreſs aſtoniſhment, that a meaſure ſo palpably abſurd ſhould have gained, for ſo long a time, ſo deep a footing in the Church.

The *Holy Scriptures*, your Lordſhips, and all Proteſtant Divines, acknowledge to be a *perfect rule of faith*: in them all needful and important doctrines, are *ſo plainly* revealed, in *words* dictated by the HOLY GHOST, [*f*] that no ſincere perſon can

[*f*] 1 *Cor.* ii. 13. Which things alſo we ſpeak, not in the words which man's wiſdom teacheth, but which the *Holy Ghoſt* teacheth.

possibly mistake concerning them, so as dangerously to err. Subscription, therefore, to these *Scriptures* is all that the interest of *Truth* and of *Religion* doth really require. Now, should any man upon earth, or any body of men, take upon them to draw up Articles and Formulas of Faith, in words *different* from the holy Scriptures, and to propose them as a *rule of faith* or a *test of truth* to others: what, my Lords, is the real nature, or the proper language of such an action? Is it not plainly this; that he thinks himself able to define the doctrines of *Revelation* in apter and more proper terms than those of the *Holy Ghost*? Does he not in effect say, that the great truths of Religion, as they stand revealed in the *Scriptures* (in words which not *man's wisdom*, but which the *wisdom of* God dictated) are not so distinctly and clearly expressed as *man's wisdom*, (yea, as *his own* wisdom) is able to express them? And is not this, my Lords, presumptuously to set himself up as a *corrector* of the HOLY GHOST? to declare himself capable of *mending* the revelation? and to profess himself *authorised* to dictate to the faith of others,

others, and to interpret the Scriptures for them?

Will it be said—But crafty and corrupt men pervert the words of the *Holy Ghoſt*, and ſhroud dangerous errors under ſcriptural forms. Let it be ſaid: and will not crafty and corrupt men as eaſily pervert, and as lightly violate and break through all the articles and forms which *human ſkill* can deviſe, or *human prudence* preſcribe? Does not the plaineſt reaſon and nature of the thing ſpeak, that thus it will be? Has not the experience of *fourteen hundred* years put it beyond all doubt? Will any articles or forms of doctrine prove a fence againſt a man of an inſincere and corrupt heart, or keep him out of the church? No: he will ever ſwim with the ſtream; he will declare or ſubſcribe any thing, as his worldly intereſt directs. No, my Lords, it is men of *virtue* and *integrity* only, your Lordſhips well know, that can poſſibly be affected here: it is men of *principle* and *conſcience* only, that theſe *ſubſcriptions* are ever capable of keeping out of the church: ſo that, if rightly conſidered, it is not in their nature to be the leaſt guard

againſt

againſt *error*, nor the leaſt ſecurity to *truth*. And when withal it is remembred, how in all ages of the church they have been moſt miſchievouſly employed by the ſeveral parties of *Chriſtians*, as they alternately prevailed! What wrecks they have made of conſcience! What ſacrifices of integrity to human ignorance and pride! What engines they have proved in the hands of the *rulers of the darkneſs of this world*, to torture and oppreſs good men, and to exalt and aggrandize the bad!—Scarce any thing can be more amazing, than that a meaſure ſo notoriouſly preposterous and abſurd; a meaſure ſo directly tending to bring *corruption* into the church, and to keep *integrity* and *conſcience* out; ſhould ever have been patronized, and ſo long impoſed by men, of whom ſo many are unqueſtionably both wiſe and good.

What has been above ſuggeſted with reference to *ſubſcriptions* to Articles of Religion, is it not, my Lords, in great meaſure applicable to the declaration of *unfeigned aſſent and conſent to* ALL *and* EVERY THING *contained and preſcribed in and by the Book of Common Prayer*, which every Clergyman is obliged, in the moſt ſolemn manner, to

make!

make! That there are a variety of things *contained* in that book, which a great number of the *Clergy*, of the moſt exemplary virtue and diſtinguiſhed abilities, conſider as highly cenſurable, and wiſh earneſtly to have reformed, your Lordſhips, and the world, are abundantly convinced. [g]

But this *aſſent* and *conſent*, which the law requires of them, obliges not to the bare *uſe* only (though to *uſe* forms in divine worſhip which in one's conſcience are believed to be not agreeable to the divine will, and which are apprehended to give wrong and injurious repreſentations of the great

[g] The *order* for reading in public worſhip the apocryphal romances of *Tobit*, *Bell* and the *Dragon*.—Sponſors introduced to the *excluſion* of the parents.—The *queſtions* put to the infant, and the *anſwers* expected from it, in the office of baptiſm.—The *authoritative* abſolution and forgiveneſs of *all ſin*, directed to be pronounced in the Viſitation of the Sick.—The expreſſions of ſtrong hope of the happineſs after death of ſome of the vileſt of men, in the office for burial.—The creed called *Athanaſius*'s; with the dreadful ſentence of *damnation*; moſt certain, inevitable, everlaſting *damnation*; upon every ſoul of man that doth not thoroughly believe it.—*Vid. Candid Diſquiſitions. Appeal to the Common Senſe of all Chriſtian People*, &c.

things

things of *Religion*, ſeems abſolutely repugnant to that reverence of the DEITY which is eſſential to his rational and acceptable worſhip) but this *aſſent* and *conſent*, I ſay, obliges not to a bare *uſe* only (as the *parliament* itſelf, after a ſolemn debate expreſly determined) but to an *approbation*, as well as *uſe*, of the things contained in that book. [*h*] Accordingly, they are not only to declare, but to ſubſcribe with their hands, That the *Common Prayer-book contains nothing in it contrary to the word of* GOD. [*i*]

Now, whether the Clergy's being compelled to profeſs, in this ſolemn manner, *unfeigned aſſent* and *conſent* to Things, which it is notorious, many if not moſt of the wiſeſt, and moſt ſerious, greatly diſapprove, does at all tend to promote the dignity of an order, repreſented as ſacred,—whether it is for the honor of Chriſtianity, or of any ſervice to the cauſe of virtue and truth—

[*h*] Lords Journals, vol. XI. p. 573, 574, 577. Commons Journals, vol. VIII. p. 533, 534. *Calamy's* Life of *Baxter*, vol. I. p. 205. And ſecond *Defence*, p. 119.

[*i*] Canon XXXVI.

rather, whether it has not had, and muſt not neceſſarily have, a contrary very pernicious and fatal effect—is ſubmitted to your Lordſhips ſerious conſideration.

It will alſo, I truſt, become every day more and more worthy of your calm attention, whether theſe pernicious and fatal effects will not be continually encreaſing. You ſee, my Lords, a moſt reſpectable part of your own Clergy (to their immortal honour be it ſpoken) entering an humble, decent, yet manly *proteſt*, againſt theſe unſcriptural claims on the RIGHTS OF CONSCIENCE. When ſo many of the graveſt, the moſt learned and pious of your own church—are either nobly withdrawing from its ſervice, or with a ſteady perſeverance requiring to be reſtored to that liberty wherewith Chriſt has made them free; it might be preſumed that even worldly prudence (all religious principles apart) would lead the governors of the Church *to diſcern the ſigns of the times*, and aſſume the merit of a reformation, which the enlightened ſpirit of the age demands—and which ſooner or later muſt be obtained.

*Infidelity* gains ground: loose and immoral principles ſpread dangerouſly among all ranks: *ſoundations* ſeem to ſhake: the generality of mankind, glad to be ſet free from the reſtraints of *religion*, have an ear always open to what can plauſibly be ſaid to weaken its authority, and to diſcredit *Revelation*. Should the conduct of its miniſters give ground for ſtrong preſumption, that, amidſt all the zeal and ſolemnity of external appearances, they think *lightly* of theſe things themſelves; and *ſubſcribe* and *declare*, not according to the real ſenſe and judgment of their own minds, but as worldly intereſt, or party, or preferment invite —What wonder, my Lords, if men of unſettled principles, or of vicious and bad hearts, catch greedily at the *occaſion*, and pour out all their ſtores of wit and ridicule, of contempt and execration on them; rave with little reſerve againſt prieſts and their craft; call *Religion* a cheat; and plunge into the deepeſt horrors of *ſcepticiſm* and *infidelity!*

What wonder, "if it brings in ſuch "diſſoluteneſs and contempt of principle "in the higher part of the world (as his

"good Lordſhip above obſerves) and ſuch "profligate intemperance and fearleſſneſs of "committing crimes, in the lower, as "muſt, if this torrent of impiety ſtop "not, become abſolutely fatal." Finally, what wonder, to hear the people trifling with *damnation* and *mutual curſes* in the ſtreets, when *thirteen* times a year they hear their leaders in religion trifling (much worſe than trifling) with them in their ſolemn offices in the church! It is certainly, my Lords, matter of very ſerious doubt, whether all the *curſes* and *damnations*, which are wantonly poured out by the army, the navy, and the lower claſſes of mankind, are really more offenſive to *Almighty* GOD, attended with greater guilt, or more threaten to draw down divine diſpleaſure upon the land, than *thoſe* which are denounced ſolemnly by the ſtanding *order* of the CHURCH [*k*].

The unhappy *diviſions*, under which the *Chriſtian* Church labours, the *ſects* and *ſeparations*, into which it is ſplit, are, ge-

[*k*]. Vid. Article IX. and XVIII. Canon 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8.—And the Athanaſian Creed.

nerally, conſidered as greatly prejudicial to the cauſe of *Chriſtianity*, and as another fatal occaſion of the growth of *infidelity*. May I be permitted, my Lords, to expoſtulate freely on this head; and to enquire whether your Lordſhips have not *here* alſo a great deal to apprehend from the trial of a future day.

It is a ſentiment of great weight, with which his late Lordſhip of *London*, in his excellent ſermons [*l*], preſſes *unbelievers*; extremely applicable to the preſent ſubject; "*The caſe* betwixt your Lordſhips, and "thoſe Fellow-chriſtians you reject, *muſt* "*be once more argued before the Judgment-* "*ſeat of* GOD. *Do you reject them becauſe* "*they Conſider well. Is this a reaſon that* "*will juſtify you to the face of* GOD?"

The power of *ordination*, or of ſending forth *miniſters* to officiate in the Chriſtian Church, is claimed by your Lordſhips, as a truſt committed ſolely to you by CHRIST *the ſupreme* PASTOR: *a truſt*, my Lords, of a nature extremely important: upon the right diſcharge of which the intereſt of

[*l*] Biſhop Sherlock, Diſcourſe I. pag. 23.

that

that Church, which *he hath purchased with his own blood*; its instruction and growth in knowledge and goodness, very greatly depend on *it*, I therefore, most surely, to be accounted for with great strictness to Him, the *supreme* PASTOR, from whom it was received.

But, suppose, my Lords, it should then be asked, as there is the highest reason to apprehend it will be asked — "How was it "that you refused to commit *this ministry* to "any, but to those who would *subscribe* and "*declare unfeigned assent* to certain *Articles* "and *Forms*, which you knew to be no *doc-* "*trines* or *parts* of my Religion! Were "you not — *charged, before* GOD, *and the* "*Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect Angels, to* "*do nothing* in this matter, *by partiality,* "*preferring one before another*, upon any se-"cular considerations! 1 *Tim.* v. 21. Had "you authority from GOD to put this yoke "upon the neck of my disciples, and thus "*to limit* this trust? Were you not con-"vinced that by *this limitation* you ex-"cluded from the *Christian ministry* many "faithful and worthy persons; men capable "of great service, and duly qualified for it,

"according

"according to *my law*, prescribed in the "*Scripture Canon*? — By what *authority*, "then, or by what *law* did you deprive the "*Christian Church* of the ministrations of "these persons, and *them* of the opportu-"nity of ministring therein?"

In that critical and awful moment, my Lords, will it be sufficient to reply, (yet what else can be replied?) — It was by the authority of the *Civil Magistrate*, and by the *Act of Uniformity*, which commanded *not to receive* them, to either the Christian *Ministry* or *Communion*, but upon terms of *their* devising: in obedience to *that authority* we rejected them from both. —

With what a look of indignation will such a plea be received by the surrounding army of *Martyrs*, who nobly sacrificed their lives, rather than sacrifice their conscience to the authority of the *Civil Magistrate*! And how severe a frown must it draw from the face of the JUDGE! —

"Did the *Civil Magistrate* die for you? "Were you baptized into *his* name, or re-"deemed by *his* blood? Can the *Civil Ma-"gistrate* now save you, or give you admis-"sion into the kingdom of Heaven? He

"gave

" gave you, indeed, the honours and emolu-
" ments of *his* kingdom: and for *these* you
" paid him homage, the homage of *con-*
" *science*, by acknowledging *his authority* to
" make laws in *my kingdom*; and by im-
" posing, at *his* pleasure, such terms of
" *ordination*, and of *communion* in the
" Christian sacraments, as I never injoined:
" and thus to the notorious impeachment
" of *my* authority, to the injury of *my* dis-
" ciples, and to the dividing of *my* Church,
" you publicly *rejected* those whom you
" knew, or might have known, that I *ho-*
" *noured* and *received*. And *verily, inasmuch*
" *as ye did it to these* MY BRETHREN, *ye*
" *did it unto* ME.—Was it not my ex-
" press command that you should *call no man*
" *upon earth*, MASTER; that you should
" acknowledge *no authority* in matters of
" Religion but that of JESUS CHRIST? Was
" not *this authority* a prerogative, a glory,
" given in reward of my meritorious death?
" Is not *the* LAMB *that was slain*, and is not
" He ALONE, *worthy to receive this honour*?
" But by submitting to *another Sovereign* in
" things pertaining to Religion, and en-
" forcing *his laws* to the exclusion of *my*
" *servants*

"*ferviant's* from the Chriſtian Miniſtry and
"Church, to *that Sovereign* has your alle-
"giance been unworthily tranſferred—See,
"if he can now reward the homage you
"have paid him!—Whoever *thus ſeeks to*
"(*ſo he*) *obey and pleaſe men, he is not the*
"*ſervant of* CHRIST. *Gal.* i. 10.

The brethren, my Lords, whom you reject, have lodged their appeal before a *Supreme* Court: *there* you are to appear with them, and the cauſe is to be reheared.—*Conſider well*, (to reſume the words of the good Biſhop) *are the reaſons*, on which you now reject them *ſuch as will be ſufficient to juſtify you to the face of* GOD!

Being entered ſo far into this important ſubject, with your Lordſhips permiſſion I will advance a ſtep farther, and obſerve,

That it is a mighty prejudice, with ſome men of ſenſe and conſideration, againſt CHRISTIANITY, that, as it ſtands exhibited in our *publick forms*, and the *rituals* of the Church, it carries in it what they think, at leaſt, what *unbelievers* think, plain marks of *impoſture*; violent and ſtrong *ſuſpicions*, that it could not poſſibly come from GOD. For it gives to all its Clergy ſuch high and

transcendent *Powers*, as a God of infinite Wisdom can never be supposed to give; *Powers*, which set the *Clergy* far above all *Kings* and *Potentates* of this world; which make it not the *duty* only, but the *interest* of Princes to bow down before them; and of the people to bring presents, and to lick the dust at their feet.

CHRISTIANITY, my Lords, as it is professed and practised by your Lordships, imparts to all its Bishops *a power to give the* HOLY GHOST: and to all its Priests, thro' your Lordships hands, it gives AUTHORITY *either to* FORGIVE, *or to* RETAIN *the sins* men commit against the MAJESTY and *Laws of Heaven*: SIN, Divines have taught us, is ever to be considered as the greatest of all evils; far more to be dreaded than sickness, poverty, pain or death. This appears to have been the general sentiment of mankind, in all ages of the world. Accordingly, what sacrifices have not men made! what penances submitted to! what pilgrimages performed! to obtain *forgiveness* of their crimes; readily offering up, not hecatombs of beasts only and rivers of oil, but even their own beloved children, *the fruit of their body, for the sin*

*of their ſoul.* Now this SIN, the object of men's ſo juſt and ſo direful apprehenſion, there is not *a Prieſt* your Lordſhips ordain, but you give him *full power and authority* from GOD, even in the name of the HOLY TRINITY, either *to forgive, or to retain:* and to *qualify* him for ſo vaſt a truſt, that he may exert *properly* this important power, (for which nothing leſs can ſuffice) you *give him the* HOLY GHOST.

*Receive* (you ſay) *the* HOLY GHOST — *Whoſe ſins* THOU *doſt forgive, they are forgiven: and whoſe ſins* THOU *doſt retain, they are retained: in the name of the* FATHER, *of the* SON, *and of the* HOLY GHOST. *Amen.*

Theſe are the *ſtupendous powers*, my Lords, with which your Lordſhips inveſt, and ſend forth into the world, *every Prieſt you* ordain. And in conſequence of *theſe powers*, in the *Viſitation of the Sick*, upon the perſon's confeſſing, and deſiring *abſolution*, (nay ſometimes without it, as in the caſe of Charles the Second) the Prieſt is directed to pronounce, as from the mouth of *Almighty* GOD, this ſolemn ſentence of REMISSION.

*By the* AUTHORITY *committed unto me, I* ABSOLVE *thee from* ALL THY SINS; *in the name of the* FATHER, *and of the* SON, *and of the* HOLY GHOST.

The *Pope*, who is, I apprehend, the firſt *Clergyman* upon earth who claims to himſelf this power; and *from* and *through* whom all *Clergymen*, who aſſume it, muſt acknowledge it derived; his *Holineſs*, I ſay, ſuppoſing him poſſeſſed of this power, *moſt rightly* demands homage of all ſecular *potentates*, and declares himſelf PRINCE *of all the kings of the earth*: and all *potentates* and *people*, who acknowledge this power, *moſt rightly* pay the ceremony of the ſtirrup and the ſlipper, and bow with veneration before *their Lord God, the Pope* [*m*].

But *this power*, my Lords, which gives the *Pope* this preheminence over all *princes* (and which gives it *moſt juſtly*, if really poſſeſſed) is the *very ſame* (my Lords, I repeat it, is the *very ſame*) which your Lordſhips declare yourſelves to give to *every prieſt* you ordain. For the power *to forgive*, or *to retain* the ſins of men, is the very ſame as to *have*

[*m*] This title he aſſumes, and it is publicly given him.

*the keys of the kingdom of heaven*, either to open or ſhut its gates. If therefore your Lordſhips, the *Biſhops*, do, as you moſt ſolemnly profeſs, give this *tranſcendent power*; you really conſtitute ſo many *delegates* and high *commiſſioners* from heaven; and *authoriſe* them to diſpenſe its *pardons*, or its *curſes* amongſt men. And what reverence or revenue will any man, who loves his ſoul, think too great to be given to ſuch characters as theſe! [*i*]

But if THIS, my Lords, be *Chriſtianity*—is it any wonder that *Chriſtianity* is ridiculed, is deſpiſed, is railed at, and reviled with very little reſerve? But is not THIS, my Lords, *Chriſtianity* (I appeal to your Lordſhips impartial judgment, and to that of the whole world)

[*i*] This doctrine, if believed by the laity, ought to bring them at the Prieſt's feet; as the ambaſſadors of *Rimini* at the feet of Pope *Martin* IV. repeating thrice theſe words—*Thou that takeſt away the ſins of the world, have mercy upon us!*

"*Profane* beyond all *profaneneſs* (ſays Dr. *Clarke*) is "the doctrine of thoſe who contend, that the apoſtles "themſelves, much leſs that any of *their* fallible ſucceſſors, had a diſcretionary power of *forgiving* or *re*"*taining* whoſe ſins they pleaſed." Dr. *Samuel Clarke's* Serm. Vol. VIII. Serm. XVII.

world is not THIS, *Christianity*, as it stands exhibited in the public forms, and in the constant practice of your Church?

May I be permitted to add — If to a judgment of the greatest candor there appears strong reason to presume, that their Lordships, the Bishops of that Church, KNOW that they have no power from *Almighty* GOD to give the *Holy Ghost*, at the very time that they are professing, with great solemnity, to give it; and, that they have no authority from the *sacred Trinity* to invest the priests they ordain with ability *to forgive*, or *to retain* the sins of men, at the very time that, in so solemn a manner, they are pretending to impart it to them; and finally, That the priest, at the very time that, in the name of the HOLY TRINITY, he is *authoritatively* absolving a man from the guilt of ALL HIS SINS, knows in his own conscience, that he has no authority from GOD at all to absolve him from any *one sin*; if to a judgment of the greatest candor, my Lords, there appears reason thus to think — What idea must men form of *the* RELIGION of *such actions* and *such characters* as these? What sen-

ſentiments and reflections muſt naturally ariſe, when one ſees their *Lordſhips* ſtand forth in the preſence of *Almighty* GOD, and before angels and men profeſſing to confer gifts, and to impart ſpiritual and tranſcendent powers, if *conſcious*, at the very time, that the whole ſolemnity is mere parade, and that they have no ability at all to give them! What wonder if, in the indignation ſuch a ſight muſt inſpire, CHRISTIANITY be abhorred by perſons, already not prejudiced in its favour, or at all kindly diſpoſed to it; and treated as an errant cheat; and its *Miniſters* as impoſtors, ſent out with *mock-powers* to terrify, to delude, and to enſlave the ſouls of men!

But *Chriſtianity*, GOD be praiſed, *Scripture-Chriſtianity* is quite free from this reproach. A power *to forgive* or *to retain Sins*, it gave only to the twelve *Apoſtles*, the founders of the Chriſtian Church; and, to qualify them for this truſt, they were actually *inſpired* and *filled with the* HOLY GHOST: they had the gift of diſcerning ſpirits; could miraculouſly ſmite incorrigible offenders with diſeaſes or death, as they

did

did *Elymas* the ſorcerer, *Ananias* and *Sapphira*; and thus *retained* or *bound* their ſins upon them: And they had power alſo miraculouſly to caſt out devils, and to heal all manner of diſeaſes, and thus *forgave* or *releaſed* men from the penalty of their ſins.

But as *this power*, ſince the *apoſtolic* age, is ceaſed, (by all Proteſtants *acknowledged* to be ceaſed) from the Church; and nothing but the *miraculous* operation of the HOLY GHOST can poſſibly impart it, or qualify a perſon for it; How ſtrange beyond expreſſion, that amidſt the great piety and learning, which its keeneſt adverſaries muſt confeſs to ſubſiſt in the Church, a pretenſion ſo *extravagant*, not to ſay *profane*, ſhould ſtill maintain a place!

What adds, my Lords, exceedingly to the ſtrangeneſs of the caſe, is; that this form of ordaining Prieſts—"*Receive the* HOLY "GHOST—*Whoſe ſins thou forgiveſt, they* "*are forgiven*, &c." was never uſed, never known in the *Chriſtian* Church for the firſt *thouſand* years; was never attempted to be introduced till the *eleventh* or *twelfth* century; which every one knows to be a period

of

of the deepeſt darkneſs, ſtupidity and oppreſſion the Church ever felt.

*Morinus*, a learned Prieſt, [*k*] has publiſhed *ſixteen* of the moſt antient *rituals*, or forms *of Ordination* uſed in the Church, from the earlieſt ages of Chriſtianity in which any ſuch are found. In the ſeveral changes and additions under which theſe forms have ſucceſſively paſt, is ſeen how the ſpirit of *ſuperſtition* gradually wrought: [*l*] Every

[*k*] De Ordin. Sacr. See a Vindication of the Ordination of the Church of *England*, by Biſhop *Burnet*. Printed 1688.

[*l*] In the Ordination of a *Biſhop* — The anointing the head, and hands, and thumb with oyl — The laying the Goſpel on his head — The Gloves — The Sandals — The Ring — The Staff — The Dalmatica (a veſtment like a croſs) — The Mitre — The Inthronization, or ſeating him in his chair — moſt of which are attended with reſpective collects or prayers.—

In the Ordination of a *Prieſt* — The bleſſing and conſecration of his hands — The anointing them with oyl — Then anointing his head with prayer — Then the ſacred veſtment given with a ſolemn benediction — Then the ſacred veſſels, the patten with the hoſties, and the chalice with the wine, are given with theſe words, *Receive thou power to offer ſacrifice*, &c. Then the Biſhop makes a croſs in his hands with oyl and chriſm: Then lays his hands on the Prieſt's, and ſays, *Receive the Holy Ghoſt: whoſe ſins*, &c.

Every age adding some ridiculous rite, or extravagant claim, to the inventions of the former, till it grew to the present enormous mass in the *Roman* Pontifical.

But it is extremely observable, my Lords, that in not one of the first *fifteen rituals* (from the *fifth* to the *twelfth* century) doth the *form* now used — *Receive the* Holy Ghost; *whose sins*, &c. appear. It is the *last* only, the *fifteenth*, (which *Morinus* takes to be but about 300 years old) which assumes to itself *this power*. Yea amidst the pride and intoxication of this corruptest State of the Church, there seems to have so much sense and modesty remained, as to make it boggle at a claim so extravagant as this: For the learned Priest observes, that in *two* other *pontificals*, of the same age, this form — *Receive the* Holy Ghost, &c. was not found.

And is this *extravagant pretension*, my Lords, which the Church of *Rome*, amidst all its pride and wantonness of superstition, from the *fifth* to the *twelfth* century, never presumed to make, now openly *avowed* and *adopted* by our Church! This *plant*, which

ſprang up from the moſt corrupted ſtate which even the *papacy* ever ſaw; is it not only received into this enlightened, this reformed, this noble part of the *Chriſtian* vineyard, but here ſuffered to take root, to flouriſh greatly and to grow! May GOD in mercy awaken a ſpirit of integrity and of fortitude in all whom it may concern; and wipe from the *Chriſtian* name the deep ſcandal and reproach it unrighteouſly ſuffers!

Is there no room, my Lords, to apprehend the diſpleaſure of *Almighty* GOD at the repreſenting CHRISTIANITY in ſo *injurious* a light? Were the men of *Bethſhemeth* ſmitten with death for looking preſumptuouſly into the Ark; [q] and *Uzza* for ſtretching out his hand to ſupport it; [r] and *Ananias* and *Sapphira* for lying to the HOLY GHOST? [s] And can the *Name* of GOD; and the *ever-bleſſed* TRINITY; and the doctrines, the rites and ſacraments of CHRISTIANITY, be trifled with, and profaned, and proſtituted to purpoſes of *worldly* intereſt and ambition, without danger of

[q] 1 *Sam.* vi. 19. [r] 2 *Sam.* vi. 7. [s] *Acts* v. 5.

*divine*

*divine* resentment? Is there not a time coming, when HEAVEN will *visit for these things*? [t]

The *signs of the times* seem strongly to prognosticate some approaching great events. *Christianity* is now passing a strict examination: it shuns not, but invites the most critical search. The consequence of this search, there is little question, will be, that *superstition* must totter; and that all claims and pretensions of a *spiritual* kind, not founded on *Truth*, nor supported by *Right*, must fall before the *axe laid at the root*. But, whilst *the tares are plucking up*, there is danger lest the *wheat be also destroyed with them*.

[t] It was the complaint of the late excellent Bishop *Burnet*, (and there are many others, no doubt, of my Lords the Bishops, who can sincerely make the same,) *that the* EMBER WEEKS *were the burden and grief of his life*; and that the things that he was *then* called to see and to perform, with regard to the candidates who came to be ordained, *did often tear his heart, and pierced his soul, and made him cry out*, Oh that I had the wings of a dove! *Pastoral Care*, *Preface* to the *third edition*.

The *freedom of thinking*, in which the *preſent* age glories, is, indeed, diſſipating apace the charm of ſpiritual *ſorcery*, by which the underſtandings and conſciences of the *former* were enthralled. But it is too natural to the human mind to run into extremes; and having broken from the chains of gloomy *ſuperſtition*, to ruſh headlong into the wilds of diſconſolate *infidelity*. Into thoſe deſolate wilds multitudes of all ranks, both in high and low life, are ſeen crouding with haſte. And it ſeems, my Lords, to require no *ſpirit of prophecy* to ſay—WHITHER *theſe things tend! and what their end will ſhortly be!* A ſmall degree of foreſight ſeems ſufficient to ſee, that they haſtily and directly tend to the utter demolition, not only of the preſent *eccleſiaſtical* ſyſtem, but of all *eſtabliſhed* forms and offices of Religion;—That the *ſceptical* and *looſe* principles which ſpread through the land are the dangerous artillery, which *the enemy* is playing upon the *high-places* and the *ſtrong-holds* of the Church; that, therefore, prudence ſtrongly dictates, that we not only *deſert*, but *level*, what are called the out-works, which we know to be *untenable*; and call in every

*friendly hand*, to unite as one body, in the common defence.

It was, perhaps, with little leſs than a *prophetic ſpirit* that a very learned and worthy *Prelate* has expreſſed his wiſh, "That "ſomething was done to convince the world, "that the Clergy of the Church are not "averſe to a *reformation* of ſome parts of her "*public ſervice*: ſince, otherwiſe, they may "give offence by their obſtinacy and ſeem-"ing infallibility; and if a ſtorm ſhould "ariſe, may run a riſque of having the tree "torn up by the roots, which they might "have ſaved by a little pruning." [*u*]

The period, my Lords, ſeems near approaching, in which *the angel is commanded to thruſt in his ſharp ſickle, and to gather the cluſters of the vine of the earth* (i. e. of the mundane or worldly CHURCH) *becauſe her grapes are fully ripe*. [*x*] A diſpoſition ſeems moving in all nations around us, in *nations* where it could leaſt be expected to appear, to ſcrutinize and retrench the exorbitant claims and revenues of the CHURCH; and to demand ſome of the immenſe ſuperfluous

[*u*] Eſſay on Spirit, *Preface*, p. 53. [*x*] Rev. xiv. 14.

wealth

wealth of that opulent *ally* for the preſſing exigences of the STATE. And if in countries where *Popery* reigns, in all its rigor, theſe retrenchments are made, what may not juſtly be expected in our own, where *diſſoluteneſs and want of principle* (as the pious Biſhop above obſerves) ſpread widely amongſt *the higher ranks*; whilſt *the lower* are divided into numerous ſects, not zealouſly attached to the pomp of the eſtabliſhed worſhip: and whilſt the emiſſaries from *Rome* are ſeducing *thouſands* into their tents; all whoſe power and cunning will be exerted to the utmoſt, on the leaſt inviting occaſion, to demoliſh *the* FORTRESS, whoſe artillery hath ſeverely galled them, and upon whoſe ruins they hope to raiſe their *exploded ſuperſtition* to its ancient grandeur again.

Is there any more likely way to procure *a lengthening of tranquility*, than, as the Prophet adviſes, *to break off iniquity by righteouſneſs*: to correct miſtakes; to ſupply deficiencies; to remove *the rocks* upon which the integrity of thouſands hath been miſerably wrecked; to demoliſh ſeparating walls; and to extend the arms of the

*Church*,

*Church*, as wide as those of CHRIST and the *Apostles* were extended. That Church *alone* which is built upon this catholic and wide bottom is like to stand firm, and to sustain the shock of rising storms.

Having trespassed, I fear, too far upon your Lordships patience already, I add no more at present—But that as your Lordships have the glory of standing in the first rank of the defenders of our *holy faith*; and many of your reputable body have, with irresistible force, pleaded the cause of CHRISTIANITY against its avowed enemies; so there is a service yet behind, to which GOD, your *Country*, and the interest of *Religion* seem loudly to call you forth. CHRISTIANITY, my Lords, lies bleeding of the wounds it hath received *in the house of its friends*; wounds by far the most dangerous of any it suffers: there are few persons living more able than your Lordships to close up these wounds, and to apply an healing hand. The high reverence and esteem in which your Lordships are held by all ranks of the *clergy*, and the influence you are possessed of in the Legislature, will give a weight and success to any salutary counsels your

Lordships

Lordſhips may propoſe, not ſo eaſy to be obtained from any other quarter. Through the favour of Heaven, we are bleſſed with a government, which, there is reaſon to believe, needs not to be petitioned, by thoſe who have the adminiſtration of *ſpiritual affairs* to eaſe them of any grievances, to ſupply any defects, and to alter or reform whatever in the preſent ſyſtem may need to be reformed.

Many of your predeceſſors, my Lords, have been ſo penetrated by the love of truth, ſo devoted to what they believed to be the genuine doctrines of Chriſtianity, that they ſuffered bonds, impriſonment, and even a tormenting death itſelf—rather than ſupport, by their influence or example, the cauſe of ſuperſtition and error.——But your lot, my Lords, is caſt in much happier times—you are ſo favourably circumſtanced, that you have it in your power to reform thoſe corruptions in the Engliſh Church—which the wiſeſt of your body preſume not to defend,—and at the ſame time may preſerve your temporal emoluments, recover your declining influence in the Chriſtian Church—give peace to thouſands of ſincere, but,

at preſent, aggrieved and offended Chriſtians—enlarge, and be enabled triumphantly to defend the catholic and broad bottom on which alone the reformation can poſſibly be defended — and, in ſhort, may cauſe yourſelves to be conſidered by the preſent, and honoured and revered by future generations, as the illuſtrious friends of genuine and uncorrupt Religion, of Liberty, and Truth. ——

But permit me, my Lords, to remind you—that theſe advantages, even great as they are, vaniſh into nothing when compared with the future glorious recompence which will await every ſincere friend to the intereſt of pure and undefiled Religion, as it is delivered in the Goſpel of Jeſus.

You, my Lords, are all haſtening, and ſome of you very near, to the inviſible and eternal ſtate—It muſt ſometimes ſurely affect your minds in the hours of calm meditation—that you are to appear (ſtripped of every preſent flattering diſtinction) before Jesus Christ, the ſupreme Paſtor and King of the Church, in a character more peculiar, I might ſay more reſponſible, than that of other men. Can it be

forgotten, that ſuch extenſive powers — ſuch diſtinguiſhed privileges in this life — muſt be ſtrictly accounted for in the next?

That your Lordſhips may have the unſpeakable ſatisfaction in life, the conſolation at death, and the glory in a future ſtate of having exerted, with all the reſolution and zeal of *Chriſtian Biſhops*, the great powers of which you are poſſeſſed. — That when your Lordſhips ſhall ſoon ſtand (as it muſt, my Lords, be *very ſoon*) before the *ſupreme* PASTOR, to render an account of your high ſtation in his Church, it may appear to your everlaſting honour, that you were ready, not to *riſque* only, but even to *ſacrifice* every worldly intereſt, to reſcue the *Chriſtian name* from the reproach you ſaw it ſuffer, — prays, with great ſincerity,

Your Lordſhip's

moſt obedient, &c.

A CHRISTIAN.



POST-

# POSTSCRIPT.

DR. *Stebbing*, in his late *Inſtructions of a Pariſh Miniſter*, Part II. owns, — That the doctrine *of Sacerdotal Abſolution* has no foundation in Scripture.—"That ſome of "the methods practiſed in the primitive "Church, with regard to reſtoring peni-"tents, have very much the *air of a farce*. "—That for the firſt thouſand years the "forms of *Abſolution* ran all in the form of "a prayer, and not in the form of a peremp-"tory definitive ſentence, as it now ſtands in "the *popiſh* forms, and in one of *our own* "forms, from them (*Viſitation of the Sick.*) "The *popiſh* form of *Ordination* alſo," the learned Doctor obſerves, "is retained in the "Church of *England*. Theſe two forms are "relative to each other, and cannot ſtand ſe-"parately: for the *one* conveys the power "which the *other* exerciſeth; and they are "NOVELTIES alike—And it is very much

"to be wiſhed that they were both properly altered. Diſſenters would find leſs "matter for cenſure, and Infidels for pro"fane rallery."

"The late Biſhop *Bull*," he ſays, "who "was one of the ableſt ſcholars, the ſtaunch"eſt Churchmen, and the beſt Chriſtians "of his time, when he was upon his "death-bed, refuſed to have this form read: "and ordered the Miniſter that attended "him, to uſe that form which ſtands in "the Office for the Holy Communion in "its ſtead."

The worthy *Doctor* "freely blames thoſe "who graſp at the ſhadow of an *authority*, "which in truth and ſubſtance we muſt all "renounce. What elſe do we, when we "*pretend* to abſolve conſcience? We may "uſe an hundred diſtinctions, if we pleaſe: "we may ſay that the Abſolution is not "*authoritative* but *declaratory*; or, that it "is not *judicial* but *miniſterial*: but if you "would ſpeak to be underſtood, you muſt "ſay, that, with reſpect to any real in"ternal effect, it is NOTHING; and you "will ſpeak *truth* too: for all the reſt, "if you will preſerve to GOD his *pre*-

"*rogative*

"rogative to forgive sin, are words with-
"out meaning." Vid. *Pag.* 37, 38, 39, 51, 52.

Yet at this *shadow* every Clergyman in *England* presumptuously grasps, claiming publicly this *authority* which is the sole *prerogative* of GOD! But if the *Absolution*, as to any real effect, be acknowledged to be NOTHING; what must the public claim and avowal of it be, but infinitely *worse* than NOTHING!—What it is I forbear to say.—~~or~~ The enemies of *Christianity* will, with insulting pleasure, tell.—~~I~~

SUP-

# SUPPLEMENT.

IT hath been frequently aſſerted, by the advocates for conformity to the Church of *England*, and is, we believe, the opinion of many, if not the greater part of the Clergy, that the unfeigned aſſent and conſent, which the Act of Uniformity requires, to all and every thing contained in the Book of Common-Prayer and Adminiſtration of Sacraments, &c. relates to the *Uſe* of the things preſcribed, and not to the *inward* and *entire* Approbation of whatever is enjoined and included in that book. The contrary might juſtly be argued from the general language of the Act, and eſpecially from the word *unfeigned*, which cannot well be applied to any other than the real conviction of the mind. But not to inſiſt upon this point, it will be evident from the following account, taken from the Lords and Commons Journals, what was the ſenſe of the legiſlature on the ſubject.

In the year 1663, a Bill was brought into the Houſe of Commons, and paſſed there, entitled, "An Act for relief of ſuch perſons as, by ſickneſs "or other impediment, were diſabled from ſub-"ſcribing the declaration in the Act of Uniformity, and explanation of part of the ſaid Act." This Bill was carried up to the Houſe of Peers on the 18th of *July*, and was read the firſt and ſecond time on the 24th of that month, after which it was referred to a Committee of twenty-ſix Lords. The Committee made their report the next day, and, beſides ſome alterations and amend-

amendments of little importance, propoſed to the conſideration of the Houſe, a clauſe to be added as follows:

"And be it enacted and declared, by the au-
"thority aforeſaid, That the declaration and ſub-
"ſcription of aſſent and conſent in the ſaid Act
"mentioned, ſhall be underſtood only as to the
"practice and obedience to the ſaid Act, and
"not otherwiſe."

When the queſtion was put, "whether to a-
"gree with the Committee in this clauſe," it was reſolved in the affirmative; fourteen Lords entering their proteſt againſt it, as deſtructive to the Church of *England*. Theſe were the Duke of *York*, the Earls of *Derby*, *Dorſet*, *Bridgwater*, *Northampton*, *Peterborough*, and *Berkſhire*, the Lord Viſcount *Mordaunt*, and the Lords *Gerard*, *Bramley*, *Maynard*, *Colepeper*, *Lucas*, *Berkley* of *Stratton*, and *Cornwallis*.

But when the Bill was ſent back from the Lords to the Commons, on the 26th of *July*, the additional clauſe met with a different fate. The queſtion being put, to agree with the Lords in its being made part of the Bill, the Houſe was divided; and the queſtion was carried in the negative, by a majority of forty-two to thirty. At the ſame time, it was reſolved, that a conference ſhould be deſired with the Lords, upon the amendments to the Bill. The conference was held on the day following; and one of the managers on the part of the Commons, ſpeaking of the additional clauſe, declared, that what had been ſent down from the upper houſe, touching the Bill, had neither juſtice nor prudence in it. This gave offence to the Lords, and occaſioned an order, That, at the next ſeſſions, the Houſe would take into ſerious conſi-

deration,

deration, before they entered upon any other matter whatſoever, how to provide for the future, that their privileges might not be infringed or broken. Nevertheleſs, after ſome debate concerning the matter of the conference, two queſtions were propoſed; 1ſt, Whether to proceed no farther in the Bill; and 2dly, Whether to agree with the Houſe of Commons; and the queſtion being put, Whether the firſt queſtion ſhould be firſt put, it was reſolved in the negative. Then the queſtion was put, "Whether to agree with the Houſe of Commons, "according to their laſt conference;" which was reſolved in the affirmative. On the ſame day, being the 27th of *July*, 1663, the Bill received the Royal Aſſent.

Thus it appears to have been the ſenſe of the Legiſlature, upon a very diſtinct and particular conſideration of the matter, that the unfeigned aſſent and conſent, required by the Act of Uniformity, relates not to the *Uſe* only, but to the *inward* and *entire* Approbation, of whatever is contained and preſcribed in the Book of Common-Prayer. *Lords Journals*, *Vol.* xi. *p.* 564. 570. 572. 573. 574. 577. 579. *Commons Journals*, *Vol.* viii. *p.* 526. 533, 534.

*F I N I S.*